

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 794

JC 020 303

TITLE Thai East-West Community College Workshop (Bangkok, Thailand, November 20-27, 2001). A Report.

INSTITUTION Community Colleges for International Development, Inc.

PUB DATE 2001-11-00

NOTE 11p.

AVAILABLE FROM For full text:
http://www.ccid.kirdwood.cc.ia.us/thai_east.htm.

PUB TYPE Collected Works - Proceedings (021)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Accreditation (Institutions); Administrator Role; Articulation (Education); *College Role; *Community Colleges; *Educational Development; *Educational Objectives; Foreign Countries; Program Implementation; Two Year Colleges

IDENTIFIERS *Thailand

ABSTRACT

This is a report on a workshop held in Hawaii with representatives from United States community college and the Thai Ministry of Education to help form the East-West Consortium for Community College Development in Thailand. Recommendations from the workshop included plans for a U.S. community college training team to visit Thailand and help begin the development of a community college system. The workshop focused on the internal and external structure and management of U.S. community colleges as well as the philosophy, mission, vision, and values of different institutions. The workshop looked at the role of the federal government in higher education and the roles and impact of national educational associations. The report also addresses how accreditation standards for community colleges are established, evaluated, and met. U.S. community college representatives emphasized that the strength of community colleges was their commitment to affordable, flexible, community, and industry-based programming and services. The Thai government plans to develop community colleges in all 10 provinces of the country. Development of future articulation agreements between Thailand community colleges and U.S. four-year institutions was also discussed during the workshop. The report includes information on future challenges and recommendations for Thailand community colleges. (MKF)

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Thai East-West Community College Workshop Bangkok, Thailand November 20 – 27, 2001

A Report



Background

In March of 2001 at the request of the Government of Thailand and the United States Embassy in Bangkok, a small group of U.S. community college administrators met in Honolulu with a delegation from the Thai Ministry of Education, led by then Minister of Education, Dr. Kasem Watanachai. As a result of that meeting, an East-West Consortium for Community College Development in Thailand was created. Members included the Thai Ministry and U.S. Embassy in Thailand, representatives from the Hawaii Community Colleges, The Community College of San Francisco, Eastern Iowa Community College, Crowder College in Missouri, the North Carolina Community College System, Oakton Community College in Illinois and Community Colleges for International Development (CCID). The U.S. Department of Education was also represented at the Honolulu meeting by Alan Cissell.

During the Honolulu conference, the Thai Ministry expressed a commitment to begin ten community colleges in Thailand within the next year, concentrating on rural provinces where little was now available in the way of post-secondary education. Their experience with the American community

college system led them to believe that something similar would be the most effective way to extend educational opportunities to these provinces. They requested assistance from the Consortium with needed advising and expertise to launch this new community college system in the country. Following a week of meetings in Hawaii, the Thai delegation visited community colleges in San Francisco, Iowa and North Carolina and returned even more convinced that a model similar to the American system would meet their educational needs in Thailand.

It was decided at the Honolulu meeting that with the assistance of the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, a small training team would visit Thailand before the end of the year and hold a week-long workshop on the U.S. community college system. Initially, Beng Poh Yoshikawa from the Hawaii system, John Halder from CCID, Allen Cissell representing the U.S. Department of Education, Kent Farnsworth from Crowder College, and Ed Stoessel from Eastern Iowa were scheduled to go in September. Beng Poh, John and Allen planned to spend their time in Bangkok working with the Embassy, the local Fulbright office and the Keenan Institute (a Bangkok-based foundation) on funding for later follow-up support. Ed Stoessel and Kent Farnsworth were to conduct a training workshop for those who were to direct the development of the new community college system. The events of September 11 delayed the delegation's travel until November, and health concerns kept John Halder from making the November trip. Changes in the Department of Education also made it impossible for Allen Cissell to attend, and Kent Farnsworth, Beng Poh Yoshikawa and Ed Stoessel made arrangements to spend ten days in Thailand between November 17 and 27. Two weeks before departure, the delegation learned that rather than including a group of approximately 30 Thai leaders as had initially been expected, the workshop would begin with 200, representing all ten provinces and six ministries within the government. At this late moment, George Verchola, a training specialist from Eastern Iowa with broad experience in large group facilitation was added to the workshop team, with funding support from CCID. The four member team arrived in Bangkok on November 17 with orientation days with Ministry and Embassy officials on the 18th and 19th, and workshops beginning on the 20th. Workshops sessions ran for four days, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., with approximately 170 in attendance the first day, and 80 to 100 the final three days. Dr. Beng Poh worked with Embassy, Fulbright and Keenan officials on developing funding for follow-up training, and Ed Stoessel, Kent Farnsworth and George Verchola conducted the training workshops.

Workshop Format and Content

At the request of the Thai Ministry, with some modification by the presentation team, the four days of the workshop focused on four general areas of community college structure and management. Day One was committed to an overview of the Philosophy, Mission, Vision and Values of community colleges in the United States, with a great deal of emphasis on the concept of "paradigm shifts" and the challenges that face those who attempt to introduce dramatically new approaches to problem solving. The team then reviewed the nature of a U.S. community college "system" to the degree that it exists, the role of the U.S. Department of Education in Higher Education in the United States, the nature of national associations such as AACC and ACCT, national accreditation, the essentially state-based nature of community college organization in America, and how states differ in terms of their governance systems for community colleges. It was the intent of the presentation team to stress that the strength of the community college movement lies in its unique commitment to affordable, flexible, community-based programming. The team emphasized that the Thai community college system should develop a uniqueness of its own, as it determines how it can best remain flexible, affordable and responsive to community education, training and economic development needs. The day ended with a discussion of what kinds of paradigm shifts might be necessary to develop a system similar to that discussed. Several attendees mentioned that "participation-based" workshops were a paradigm shift in and of themselves, but that they enjoyed the chance to be

involved

During the orientation days, the presenters learned that no provision had been made for professional interpreters. The newly formed Office for Community Colleges had arranged for the assistance of a group of employees who spoke reasonable English to help with translation. Fortunately, the Embassy volunteered to make its simultaneous translation equipment available to the workshop, along with two professional interpreters. Because of other commitments, this equipment was not available until noon on the first workshop day, and the team struggled along with two committed, but amateur interpreters through the first morning of the workshop. Most of the attendees did not speak sufficient English to be able to follow the presentation without translation assistance. **The availability of simultaneous translation equipment proved to be absolutely essential to the success of the workshop. Future teams should insure in advance that adequate simultaneous translation equipment is available if working with groups of more than ten who have limited facility with English.**



The second day of the workshop focused on the organization and management of community colleges at the local level. Time was spent in group activities developing mission statements, analyzing organizational models, evaluating the systems and processes that must be in place for a college to operate effectively, and determining barriers to implementing various models. A great deal of emphasis was placed on adopting a "continuous quality improvement" model from the beginning, establishing both local and central databases that would allow institutions to measure and track performance. The group again reviewed the new kinds of thinking that might be necessary to bring about organizations that could function as "community-directed" educational institutions. **It became evident to the presentation team during this session that many of the ideas being presented were more radical than had been anticipated. The idea of local control is foreign to traditional Thai organization,** and though a commitment had been made to organize local boards, these boards were planned to consist mainly of centrally appointed officials such as legislators and provincial governors. By the end of the workshop, Ministry officials were at least toying with the idea of more broadly representative boards, including business and lay members.



Day Three concentrated on conducting community needs assessments and using these as the basis for curriculum development. The team walked participants through the elements of a needs assessment, then explained how a DACUM process might be used to create a "competency-based" curriculum once program needs have been identified. Here again it was evident that community needs assessment to determine educational offerings was a new idea, but one that was enthusiastically embraced. This session ended with an exercise that helped the participants identify where they felt they could use the most immediate help in getting their new

colleges off the ground. **Surprisingly, establishing better sources of data collection and information management emerged as the greatest anticipated need.** The presentation team had the impression that programming has been rather hit and miss and centrally managed, with little thought given to what might best address the educational and development needs of local regions. Participants seemed to recognize the value of local needs assessments and performance-based program evaluation and wanted better data.

Other perceived needs included assistance with strengthening management teams, with organizational design, with curriculum development, and **particularly with establishing partnerships with other local entities such as business and social agencies. Participants tied this need to a desire to learn more about independent fundraising.** Higher education in Thailand has functioned in the past as something of an island unto itself, and participants were excited about establishing connections with businesses that might benefit from their services, and assist with finding needed programs and equipment.

The final day was dedicated to the processes of forming partnerships and of establishing a "customer-oriented" approach to doing business. Again it was clear that this was a new idea in higher education, but one that by this point in the workshop, participants were embracing with enthusiasm. An exercise asked participants to identify who their customers were, and the lists were very much like one would expect from a group of community college leaders in the U.S. **A question and answer period at the end of this day, and a wrap-up affinity diagram exercise identifying challenges and next steps, indicated a high level of frustration with a deeply entrenched bureaucracy and with widely divided areas of administrative control in the existing system. Participants were quite open with officials about their frustrations with existing barriers, some of which will be mentioned in the "Challenges" section, below.**

Provincial Visit

Following the seminar sessions, the team had the opportunity to visit Sakaeo Province where one of the new community college is to be created. Sakaeo is in Eastern Thailand along the border with Cambodia and is largely agricultural, with very limited light industry. **This visit should have occurred at the beginning of the workshop period, since many questions asked during the workshop became clearer as the team visited with local officials on their home turf, and visited institutes that are to be combined into the new colleges.** One remarkable advantage of having completed the workshop first, however, was that as the team met with provincial leaders who had attended the sessions, the discussion sounded like one being held among experienced community college leaders in the U.S. The provincial leaders had obviously gained a vision of the community college movement and potential, and were anxious to get on with the creation of the new college. Here again, though, the frustrations were evident.

In Sakaeo, six existing institutes are to be combined into the new college. These

six include a Vocational Institute which reports to the Ministry of Vocational Education, several Non-Formal Education Centers which report to the Ministry of Non-Formal Education, and an Agricultural College that reports to the Ministry of Agriculture. Each of these has its own administration and each will obviously lose some of its authority as they are combined into one. More will be said about this in the "Challenges" section below. The existing institutes are located some distance apart, and many duplicate the programs and offerings of the others. Transportation in the region is very poor, so it is not reasonable to expect students to travel far to take advantage of services. One of the team members visited another province in Northwest Thailand where some of the non-formal education centers are no more than small metal buildings in remote tribal villages. The colleges face some interesting and challenging organizational issues that will undoubtedly involve creative use of multi-site structures unique to the country.



Wrap-up Session

Two team members, Kent Farnsworth and Ed Stoessel, met for half a day following the provincial visit with members of the new Office of Community Colleges staff. Sunanta Sangthong directs this group and has assembled a very enthusiastic group of volunteers from the various ministries to lead this new college movement. This was a small group "question and answer" session and proved to be particularly fruitful. It indicated what was going on in the minds of those who will have to implement the new system at the central level, and they appeared to be asking themselves the right questions. Their concerns focused on local board leadership and how it is developed and organized, sources of funding, how multi-campus systems are organized and managed, and how budgets are developed and monies distributed within a multi-campus system. It was clear from this discussion that the central office sees the initial provincial structure as having a lead administrator, probably selected from among the presidents of the existing institutes, and some governing council that coordinates the activities of the campuses within the "district." This appeared to the U.S. team members to be the most feasible first option available as the national office begins to work its way through the legal and bureaucratic changes that will be needed before greater consolidation is possible.

Existing Strengths

Strong Top-level Support: Although the position of Minister of Education has changed since the Hawaii conference, there remains very strong support for the community college program at the top levels of government. The existing government was elected with a huge public mandate for change, and ran on a platform of educational reform and greater provincial involvement. Dr. Sirikorn Maneerin, Deputy Minister of Education, is an outspoken and influential proponent of the new community college system and frequented the workshop to lend her support, as did several other top ministry officials. Dr. Sirikorn was part of the delegation that visited U.S. community colleges and she has a very strong commitment to the community college mission and concept. There seems to be a general desire at top governmental levels to decentralize government in general, which may help with the development of elements of local control. As long as the current government stays in power and current officials are in office, the movement will receive strong central support. Several members of the General Assembly who represent the provinces sat in on the last workshop session and were also very supportive of the new movement.

Strong Office of Community Colleges: The newly formed Office of Community College Project under Sunanta Sangthong is staffed with bright, creative and energetic people who volunteered to come to the new office because they believed in its mission and possibilities. The U.S. Team agreed that they have never worked with a more dedicated and hard-working group of people. If any group can do the hard work necessary to see this to completion, this group can do it.



Enthusiastic Provincial Support: The leaders from the provinces who attended the workshops were generally very enthusiastic about mission and philosophy of community colleges. The sense of the U.S. Team was that these leaders saw the new movement as having the potential to address some of the frustrations they have experienced in terms of gaining resources and support for their efforts. Despite the frustrations they feel with bureaucracy, they do understand how the community college system could work, and are excited about the possibilities.

Commitment of Resources: Although suffering from the recession that is plaguing all of the developed world at the moment, the Government has made what for them is a fairly significant commitment of resources to helping get the new colleges off the ground.

Components in Place: This is both an asset and a challenge, but there are significant advantages to having the existing institutes already functioning in the provinces. If the system can get beyond the politics, the buildings are in place for the new colleges, much equipment exists, there is a core of trained leadership, and the community has some connection with these existing institutions. Much of the start-up expense of beginning from scratch will not be necessary as a result.

Articulation Commitments Exist: Although the initial emphasis seems to be on strengthening vocational and technical education, there is an interest in using the new colleges as feeder institutions into the four-year college system. Thailand has a system of what are called Rajabhats, similar to state colleges in the U.S. that have evolved from old normal schools. There are some 46 Rajabhats scattered around the country and several have agreed to work with the new colleges on curriculum development and articulation that will insure transfer. The U.S. team met with the presidents of several of these Rajabhats, and the interest appears to be genuine.

Identified Challenges

Divided Ministries: As mentioned above, there are currently six ministries in the Thai government that have some responsibility for education: Ministries of Primary (Elementary) Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, Vocational Education, Non-Formal Education, and Agriculture (which oversees some agricultural colleges). The challenges of bringing together institutes that report to these various ministries are obvious. There is some effort now at the central level to combine some of these ministries, but as long as vocational, non-formal and agricultural education have different reporting responsibilities at the national level, these challenges will persist.

History of Centralization: Thailand has a long history of centralized control. Even if the country is successful at decentralizing some authority and responsibility, there will be a significant learning curve involved in getting people to the point that they are ready to exercise and have faith in local control.

Lower Level Bureaucracy: Virtually every employee at the professional levels within higher education in the country is a civil servant and has civil servant rank and protections. A brochure handed out by the Non-Formal Education Center in the northwest province that was visited showed ninety-six "officials" employed by the center and its twenty-four service sites, thirty-three "permanent employees," and twenty-five "temporary employees." Presidents of institutes are elected for four-year terms and can be renewed for a second four years. The idea of hiring a president from outside of the civil service ranks or using business persons as faculty are difficult for the Thais to imagine, and moving teaching assignments around as needs change would not be possible within the current system.

Private Education: Much vocational training in the country at the moment is provided by a system of private institutes, with leadership strongly connected to key government officials. As the community colleges develop, they will need to deal with the issues of duplication, competition and political clout. Mr. Nuttee Pookayaporn, President of one of these institutes and of the Private Institute Association in the country, was a member of the visiting team in Hawaii and appears to be supportive of the new movement.

Choices of Provinces: Although the rationale for selecting the ten provinces was noble – to provide educational opportunities where they are least available and in the poorest areas – these choices have created a number of unique challenges. The provinces selected have little in the way of industry to provide immediate employment opportunities for graduates, and even if a skilled workforce is developed, there are other disadvantages for employers to relocate into these provincial areas. Infrastructure is not well established, and transportation and communications issues will need to be

addressed before these locations will be attractive to industry.



The team visited a classroom, for example, where a group of about 30 students were practicing entering web addresses into computers. When one of the team members attempted to show a small student group how to link to a U.S. community college, he was informed by the instructor that the computers were not yet linked to anything, and that phone and uplink services were not yet available to the area in a reliable enough way to assure good connection. Agriculture and tourism are obvious opportunities, but in the business and industrial program areas, some very creative support will be needed to

establish partnership relationships in these provinces that can sustain the colleges over time.

University Elitism: This issue is no stranger to American community colleges, and has been battled for 100 years. The university system in Thailand is currently highly selective and competitive, and it will take a great deal of work to convince the universities that transfers from the new community colleges are worthy of their attention. Working initially with selected Rajabhats to develop a credible reputation seems a wise way to begin the transfer process.

Public Commitment: There is such a strong desire among parents to have their children attend a university in Thailand that it will take a number of years of successful transfer performance to convince many to have faith in the community college transfer system.

Recommendations

Organization: Although it may seem inconsistent to first state that community colleges in Thailand must develop their own character and organizational structure, then make recommendations as to how they might do that, the visiting team did come away with some impressions that might be helpful to the new Office of Community College Project.

After visiting the provincial site, it does seem likely that if all of the other provinces will be combining similar kinds of institutes, some kind of multi-campus model needs to be developed with a senior administrator over the new provincial "system," and with a coordinating council made up of the presidents of the various campuses. This council might utilize a matrix management system of some kind where each campus president has responsibility across the system for one of the major functions or processes, such as facilities management, marketing and student recruitment, business affairs, etc. this matrix approach would begin to establish a sense of "oneness" in the system that might be difficult to establish otherwise, given the existing institutional histories. The new districts might also consider mixing personnel and assigning them to different campuses, if logistics allow – also breaking down old affiliations and allegiances.

Local Governance: The visiting team sees it as critical that if the new community colleges are truly going to be "community-responsive," there must be a local governing or advisory board that is broadly representative of the various interest of the province. As central authority is transitioned to the local levels, this board might begin as an advisory board, but should include representatives of area businesses, secondary schools, social services agencies and NGO's, etc. The group could be elected or appointed, but the aim should be to develop a board with a primary commitment to establishing strong linkages between the college and the community, and to ensuring the growth and viability of the college

over the long term.

Consolidation of Ministries: This recommendation goes well beyond the responsibilities of the visiting team, but seems critical to the long-term health of the new community college system. If over time the Ministries of Non-Formal Education, Vocational Education, and Agricultural Education could be combined into a Ministry of Community College Education, many of the bureaucratic hurdles that currently stand in the way of effectively bringing diverse institutions together would be removed.

Transfer Curriculum: The curriculum that is designed to prepare students to continue on to complete a university education must be carefully coordinated with the Rajabhat and university systems. There are a number of pressures now working against this, both in terms of public opinion and university elitism. Some consideration might be given to legislating articulation, at least to the Rajabhats, if a student successfully completes a prescribed course of study for an Associate of Arts Degree at the community college.

Next Steps

Dr. Beng Poh Yashikowa was very successful in her efforts to gain commitments from the Keenan Institute and from the Bangkok Fulbright office for follow-up support activities for the community college office. Future opportunities appear to include an exchange of college personnel between the U.S. and Thailand, and a follow-up visit by a smaller team to provide more specific leadership training for Thai administrators.

Based on the U.S. visiting team's sense of the value of the provincial visits as a basis for putting other information into a usable context, the team strongly feels that among the next first steps should be an effort to bring the newly-identified Thai college presidents to the United States to visit American community colleges. This will provide an opportunity for them to see what community partnerships are like, how college organizations work on the single and multi-campus level, how alternative sources of funding are developed, and how local boards operate.

The team's brief half-day experience with the Central Community College Project Staff suggests also that after this office has had several months experience struggling with organizational issues, it might benefit from another opportunity to meet as a small leadership group with two or three experienced U.S. community college leaders. This meeting would allow the groups to talk about strategies to address issues identified as the Thai Leadership group has struggled with organization. This same U.S. team could then meet with the presidents of the ten new colleges as a follow-up to their U.S. visit, and talk specifically about what the leaders have seen and its application to the Thai system. It would be our strong recommendation that these meetings be kept small and select, with no more than ten to twenty participants at a session to allow for intense and personal exchange.

The final step might be a visit by a larger team of U.S. specialists in partnership development, curriculum development, budgeting and fundraising strategies, etc. who could fan out and spend two or three days with administrative teams in several of the provinces. If five teams of two went, for example, each team could spend three or four days with two provinces, with a couple of break days in between. This intensive on-location assistance would be especially helpful after Thai leaders have visited community colleges in the United States and have some sense for what the possibilities are.

Conclusion

The relationship between community colleges in the United States and the newly emerging community

college system in Thailand has been grounded in a very successful initial workshop for Thai leaders. Dr. Beng Poh Yashikowa has identified several viable opportunities for funding support for continuing this relationship. The newly developing system of community colleges in Thailand has strong government support and talented leadership, but faces a number of serious challenges as it organizes across the country. The East-West Consortium must remain aggressive in its pursuit of other opportunities to cooperate and partner with the Thai system, and additional exchanges and consulting follow-up within the next two years will be critical to the success of this newly emerging system.

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